

News Election 2017

News

War heroes fire a warning shot about crisis in military funding

Deborah Haynes Defence Editor

Theresa May has been urged to fix a funding crisis in the armed forces that is threatening Britain's ability to fight wars in a letter signed by former military chiefs and decorated junior personnel.

A failure to address the challenges facing defence would damage Britain's credibility on the international stage, they warned.

"The armed services are having to seek further very damaging savings in manpower, support and training at a time when the likelihood of combat operations is increasing," the letter said.

"These realities of the security situation must be faced," it added, listing the threat posed by President Putin's "nuclear sabre-rattling" over Crimea and the unpredictability of North Korea.

The letter was hand-delivered to Downing Street by James Glancy, 34, a former Royal Marines captain who earned a Conspicuous Gallantry Cross, the second highest award for gallantry in combat, in Afghanistan in 2013.

It marks the first public intervention by the military in the election campaign and comes as Mrs May prepares to meet Jens Stoltenberg, the secretary-general of Nato, at No 10 today. Funding for the armed forces is expected to be among the topics discussed.

Britain is one of five countries that meets a Nato target to spend at least 2 per cent of GDP on defence. The letter, however, said that such "government boasts . . . are widely criticised as an accounting deception. Most analysts agree core defence expenditure for hard military power is well below 2 per cent".

The mix of 24 signatories to the letter, from Admiral of the Fleet Lord Boyce

The shrinking military

UK personnel	
Regular army	
2010	108,900
2017	79,440
Royal Navy and Royal Marines	
35,000*	
29,160	
RAF	
38,000*	
30,830*	
Sources: SDSR 2010, HCDC reports, MoD statistics	

and General Lord Richards of Herstmonceux — former chiefs of defence staff — to lance corporals Cayle Royce and Peter Dunning — a soldier and a Marine who lost their legs in combat — is a sign of the frustration across all ranks at the state of the armed forces.

The letter, also signed by General Sir Richard Barrons, a former four-star officer, and four academics, gave credit to a review of defence in 2015 that committed Britain to buying new warships, nuclear-armed submarines, supersonic jets and armoured vehicles, but it warned that the government had failed to pledge enough resources to achieve those aims.

"Responses by the [Ministry of Defence] to questions about the adequacy of the defence budget raised by respected and informed commentators have been disingenuous, evading the issue by the relentless quoting of irrelevant financial statistics," the letter said.

Sir Michael Fallon, the defence secretary, has rebutted criticism of defence spending by saying that the defence budget is rising in real terms annually and that the government has committed to spend £178 billion on

equipment and support over the next ten years. However, analysis by *The Times* has found that the military faces a £10 billion shortfall in funding over the next decade, with some experts putting the black hole at £20 billion.

The letter warned that Britain's military ambitions were based on "unidentified and economically questionable savings". It also noted that a drop in the value of the pound raised questions about the affordability of equipment bought in dollars, including the F-35 fighter jet and the missiles to be used by the Royal Navy's replacement Trident submarines. "The solution is simple: fund the [2015] review properly and if this means a commitment to increase expenditure over the lifetime of the Parliament, then do it," the letter said.

Responding to the letter, Sir Michael said: "The choice at the election is clear — between the strong leadership of Theresa May, who has shown she is prepared to defend Britain's interests in the world and will give our armed forces the resources they need, or Jeremy Corbyn, who has called for the army to be abolished and committed never to use our nuclear deterrent."

● Britain is looking at increasing the number of troops in Afghanistan four years after Nato's combat operations ended. Any new deployment, which has not yet been confirmed, is expected to be in the tens rather than hundreds of soldiers. Britain already has about 500 troops helping provide security in Kabul and training Afghan officers, along with an undisclosed number of special forces. Nato has asked its members to send extra troops to help end 16 years of violence. Theresa May and Jens Stoltenberg, Nato secretary general, meet at Downing Street today.

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First Gent is no style slouch

His wife wears a lucky tartan suit for tough days in the office; could a gingham shirt be the old faithful of Philip May's wardrobe? Expect similar blue checked styles to sell out in M&S's Blue Harbour section overnight (Harriet Walker writes).

The First Gent, 59, appeared on *The One Show* last night in a slim-fitting black blazer. His legs were encased in navy chinos; a pair of tan leather brogues could just be glimpsed under the coffee table — but there was no leopard print in sight.

When questioned about his own sartorial soft spot, Mr May replied, "jackets and stuff — quite normal, really," thereby confirming his status as red-blooded male in the eyes of the electorate.

Although his open-collared, tie-free look had something of the weekend about it, there

Philip May wears similar off-duty looks at home with his wife

were none of the usual politician-in-the-wild leasurewear gaffes here. Mr May might be on bin duty at home, as he told the presenters Matt Baker and Alex Jones, but he's no slouch when it comes to off-duty dressing.

His preppy but relaxed ensemble was a canny choice: not so buttoned up as to appear fusty, but not so casual as to tick the dreaded "embarrassing uncle" box. It was topped off with a pair of every hipster's favourite "squoval" shaped tortoiseshell spectacles, although the truly fashionable are now wearing Dennis Thatcher's favoured half-frame style again.

This Atticus Finch-at-a-farmers-market look lent Mr May an air of quiet authority, something many men of a certain age find in stonewash jeans. Thankfully, he was not Jeremy

Clarkson, nor was he a track-suited Jeremy Corbyn in his approach. In fact, the outfit was not dissimilar to the one he was photographed wearing alongside his wife for the pages of American *Vogue* last month. As his wife knows to her cost, he'll need to be careful about repeat-wears for the rest of the campaign now that every fashion editor is scrutinising his choices.

Well-heeled power couple dodge potholes around the chat show sofa

Patrick Kidd
Political Sketch

There was a moment at the end of their grilling on *The One Show* when it could have gone disastrously wrong. Theresa and Philip May had swatted aside questions about their relationship — "stable, very stable," Mrs May said, always on message — when Alex Jones, the Paxman of sofa-based suppertime chat, asked Mr May for his version of his wife's shoe obsession.

Such questions are like potholes to the unwary. No matter how shallow and unthreatening they seem, if you go at them with too much enthusiasm they can give you a costly prang. Many a man, given a chance to talk about his interests, would bore for England. Mrs May shot her husband a warning glare. "Careful now, Philip," it said.

Fortunately, he had been well trained. Or perhaps he is just naturally dull. "I quite like, sort of, ties," he said. "And jackets," he added, realising that he wasn't

actually wearing a tie with his gingham shirt at that moment. "Stuff like that." Boo.

The prime minister had handled the shoe question comfortably. As the camera zoomed in on her footwear and a TV screen showed a selection of shoes in case the audience hadn't quite grasped the nuance of the question, she beamed and told a story about how a woman in a lift had once told her that she'd been inspired to get involved in politics because of Mrs May's shoes.

Thus the Mays survived their brush with live family entertainment. They came across as a pleasant, normal middle-aged couple. If you had no interest in politics you might have assumed that they were a couple of actors from *The Archers*.

Matt Baker began with a question about the division of household chores. "I take the bins out," Mr May said. "There are boy jobs and girl jobs," his wife added, implying that boys sort out the recycling and stack the dishwasher while girls cut school budgets and bomb Syria.

Jones then turned the discussion on to Europe. "We're not leaving Eurovision, are we?" she asked.

May reveals baby blunder on primetime

Francis Elliott Political Editor

Theresa May's mother-in-law was left disappointed after a newspaper falsely claimed she had just had a baby, the prime minister revealed last night.

Mrs May volunteered the anecdote as part of a discussion on fake news in a joint interview with her husband, Philip, on the BBC's *One Show*.

"Way back when I was wanting to be selected for a seat, one of the newspapers reported I was going to have trouble being selected to fight a seat as a Conservative candidate because of my new baby," she said. "We didn't think any more of it until that afternoon, my mother-in-law rang."

Mr May said: "My mum rang. She thought perhaps there was something we hadn't told her."

Mrs May, who has spoken publicly about her and Philip's regret at not being able to have children, said: "She was disappointed." He also revealed that his wife had first harboured ambitions to become prime minister after becoming "well established" in the shadow cabinet.

In a discussion about her fashion sense the prime minister said she had met a "young woman" in the Commons who told her she had been inspired to become involved in politics by her shoes.

Mr May was asked about the prime minister's reputation as a "bloody difficult woman". He said there was "give and take in every marriage" but acknowledged that his room for manoeuvre in negotiations with his wife was limited.

"I get to decide when I take the bins out, not if I take the bins out," he said.

Ukip exodus will be crucial, says pollster

Sam Coates Deputy Political Editor

Theresa May's electoral success will be determined by the scale of Ukip's collapse rather than the performance of Jeremy Corbyn, a leading pollster says.

The Liberal Democrats could also emerge from the general election with fewer than the nine seats they had, according to Stephen Fisher from the University of Oxford.

Professor Fisher, who works on the team that produces the BBC, ITV and Sky exit poll, says that an 11-point lead for the Tories, which under uniform calculations would result in a 26-seat majority, could result in a much more substantial advantage for Mrs May on polling day.

He makes clear that while Labour's campaign will play a role in determining the result on June 8, the flood of Ukip voters returning to the Conservatives is a more critical factor.

At the local elections last week, the average Ukip vote in places where it fielded a candidate in both 2013 and in 2017 went from 29 per cent to 8 per cent in the 523 wards sampled by the BBC.

Approximately half of the Ukip 2013 vote has now gone to the Conservatives, with even more abandoning Ukip in seats that voted to remain in the EU or where there is low unemployment.

Incumbent Labour candidates in the West Midlands facing Tory opponents in second place are particularly worried about the sharp drop in Ukip support, believing that the results of Paul Nuttall's party in the local elections make far more seats vulnerable.

One Labour source said vulnerable seats included Dudley North, which was held by Ian Austin in 2015 with a 4,181 majority but 9,113 Ukip votes; Wolverhampton North East, held by Emma Reynolds with a 5,495 majority and 6,524 Ukip votes; Walsall South, which has Valerie Vaz defending a 6,007 majority with a 6,540 Ukip vote last time; and West Bromwich West, where Labour's Adrian Bailey had a majority of 7,442 and Ukip took 8,836 votes.

West Bromwich West is the 117th Conservative target seat by majority, meaning that Mrs May would be destined for a landslide if this seat was won.

The source said there were also signs of increased Tory activity in West Bromwich East, Tom Watson's seat, although they were confident the 9,470 majority would not completely erode even if the 7,949 Ukip votes disappeared to the Tories.

The Liberal Democrats could also lose seats, according to Professor Fisher. "Without either a big boost in overall support or a much stronger pattern of better performance in their areas of traditional strength, the Liberal Democrats could well end up making little or no gains at the general election," he says. "They may even end up losing seats, as the uniform swing projections from current polls suggest."

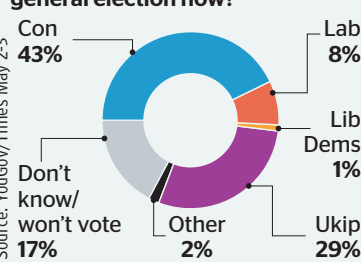
"To hold on to seats under first past the post, it is not enough to maintain your share of the vote, you need to make sure it does not fall further behind that of your main competitor."

Matthew Goodwin, a senior Fellow at Chatham House, said that many Ukip ideas were now Conservative policy.

Writing for the *Times* Red Box site, he said: "It is no secret that since becoming

Flight on the right

Where do 2015 Ukip voters go in a general election now?



Analysis

The main story of last week's local elections is clear. The Tories won lots more seats, and so they are likely to win the general election. But some of the lesser known details in the results provide further clues (Stephen Fisher writes).

Most important here is the collapse of Ukip. What is significant for next month's contest is the extent to which their vote dropped across a wide range of English county electoral divisions, which they fought in 2013 and again last week. Among the 523 divisions for which the BBC collected results, the Ukip vote dropped from an average of 29 per cent to 8 per cent.

Although many Ukip voters in 2013 and 2015 came from Labour, the polls have been consistently telling us that there is essentially only one place former Ukip voters are now going and that is to the Conservatives.

Many of the seats that Labour is defending had big Ukip votes in 2015. If half of each constituency's Ukip vote goes to the Conservatives, that would be enough to deliver the party an extra ten seats from Labour compared with traditional uniform change projections. If, as some polls suggest, the votes going from Ukip to the Tories flow at a rate greater than this, then the damage to Labour will be still worse.

David Cameron won his majority by taking Liberal Democrat seats. Theresa May is hoping to win her landslide thanks to Ukip votes. Stephen Fisher is associate professor in political sociology at the University of Oxford

leader of the Conservative Party Theresa May and her team have [gone] after the traditional social conservatives who make up the bulk of Ukip's electorate.

"May's critique of liberal elites, the 'citizens of nowhere', her support for grammar schools, the 'Brexit means Brexit' mantra, and her renewed commitment to slash net migration are all straight out of the textbook on how to win back the populist right. When Kippers say they are losing seats because they won the argument . . . well, they have a point."

Emily Gosden Energy Editor

Energy prices could still rise every year under the proposed Conservative cap, the prime minister has admitted.

Theresa May insisted it was right to intervene to tackle "rip-off" standard variable tariffs but confirmed that the cap set by the regulator Ofgem would rise if suppliers' costs increased.

"I don't think any government can ever promise that no bill is going to go up year on year," she said.

Mrs May has said the cap should save the 17 million households on standard tariffs up to £100 a year.

Analysts agreed the proposed cap was likely to reduce standard tariffs initially, but warned it was then likely to have to rise to accommodate increases in policy and network costs that are levied on bills. These include subsidies for new offshore wind farms, which have been awarded contracts guaranteeing payments in future years.

Cornwall Energy, an industry consultancy, said cost increases of about £50 per household were "locked in" over the next parliament. "Administering the price cap therefore risks being tantamount to signing off bill increases for the industry," it warned.

Wholesale gas and electricity costs will be the other major factor determining the level of the cap, which will be reviewed by Ofgem every six months.

Mrs May sought to distance herself from Ed Miliband's 2013 proposal for a price freeze. "Crucially, it will be possible for that cap to move, and the independent regulator will set it." Ofgem would however be "making sure that

FACT CHECKER

The prime minister says that the energy price cap will cut bills. Energy firms, along with some price comparison websites, say the cap will stifle competition and end up pushing prices up. In reality, the picture is a little more complicated (Raphael Hogarth writes).

About two thirds of customers are on "standard variable tariffs" (SVT). These are the rates the companies charge by default if the consumer has not chosen a specific energy plan. Households on SVTs tend to pay more than consumers who have selected a fixed-rate deal.

The Conservatives want to mandate Ofgem to cap the price of electricity for customers on standard variable tariffs, subject to review every six months. So in the short term, prices would go down for any SVT consumer who was paying a price higher than the cap.

Theresa May says 17 million households will benefit, some to the tune of £100 per year. This claim is hard to back up before the detail of the promise emerges.

If energy companies see their revenue hit by the SVT cap, it is likely that they would stop offering some of their discounted fixed rate tariffs to make up lost income.

In fact no customers are guaranteed a price fall, or even freeze. If the wholesale price rises, Ofgem will raise its cap.

there are not these sudden and unexpected and significant hikes in prices", she claimed. The former Labour leader responded that the Conservative plan was a "price con, not a price cap".

Energy suppliers, switching sites and right-leaning think tanks yesterday heaped criticism on the Conservative plan, warning that it would increase prices for customers who shop around for deals and deter investment.

Greg Clark, the business secretary, also faced criticism after admitting that he had never bothered attempting to switch supplier because he believed it was "quite a hassle to do so".

Martin Lewis, head of the Money Saving Expert website, called the comment "disgraceful" and said that it should "probably disqualify him from being energy minister".

The "Big Six" energy suppliers are expected to respond to a squeeze on their standard tariff profits by stopping cheap fixed-price deals.

Stephen Fitzpatrick, chief executive of one small supplier, Ovo Energy, said the cap would "act as a catalyst for innovation amongst suppliers" and "ensure customers are treated fairly".

Shares in Britain's two largest suppliers, SSE and Centrica, the owners of British Gas, fell by more than 1 per cent.

Eon, another of the Big Six, warned that the price cap would "harm investor confidence at a time when the country requires significant investment to deliver energy security".

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